THE WHITE HOUSE
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Background:
The Fall Season- A History of the White House Gardens and Grounds

October 4, 2019 (Washington, D.C.) – Since 1973, the President and First Lady have opened the White House Grounds to visitors for self-guided tours of the South Lawn and gardens twice a year. In the fall, trees at the White House reflect the changing season by turning shades of yellow, orange and red, providing an opportunity to admire the foliage, gardens, and nature surrounding the Executive Mansion.

This year, the White House Fall Garden Tours are Saturday, October 19, from 10:00 AM to 4:30 PM, and Sunday, October 20, from 10:00 AM to 2:30 PM.

"Fall is a wonderful time of year to visit the White House Grounds," said Jonathan Pliska, author of *A Garden for the President: A History of the White House Grounds*, **a book published by the White House Historical Association**. "Seasonal flowers carefully tended by National Park Service gardeners are at peak bloom and offer a final glimpse of summer flair. The hundreds of grand trees adorning the landscape have begun to change color - erupting in bright hues of yellow, orange, and red. The Executive Mansion welcomes trick-or-treaters on Halloween, and in November the president ceremoniously pardons a Thanksgiving turkey. This happy tradition dates all the way back to Abraham Lincoln's first term in 1863, and in recent years has been held outdoors in the Rose Garden."

Interview Opportunity: Jonathan Pliska, author of *A Garden for the President: A History of the White House Grounds,* is available for interviews. To arrange, please contact jfredericks@whha.org.

Facts about the White House Grounds:

- One chestnut oak just southeast of the White House may be older than the mansion itself. Chestnut oaks of similar diameter have been found to be more than 300 years old. If the tree is similarly old, it would be the only living thing

to have seen the comings and goings of every American president since John Adams became the first to occupy the home on November 1, 1800.

- Thomas Jefferson was the first president with the time and resources to improve the White House gardens and grounds. He organized the grounds and created a barrier against unhealthy swamps. He also leveled out the ground on which the White House was built. Many of his improvements defined the landscape until a decade after the Civil War.

- President Rutherford B. Hayes began the tradition of planting commemorative trees in the 1870s. Today, the South Lawn features more than three dozen special commemorative trees, which contribute to the fall foliage of the White House.

- James Buchanan completed a glass conservatory in 1857 above the West Colonnade. By the turn of the twentieth century, the Conservatory had expanded to nine service buildings, including a grapery, fern house, orchid house, geranium house, and rose house. These greenhouses stood until 1902 when they were removed to allow room for the Temporary Executive Office Building, known today as the West Wing.

- To encourage Americans to conserve resources for the war effort, President Woodrow Wilson replaced lawn mowers with a flock of sheep. Additionally, the flocks' wool was auctioned off to raise funds for the Red Cross.

- In 1943, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt announced the planting of a victory garden for the White House Grounds. 10-year-old Diana Hopkins, who lived at the White House from 1940-1943 with her father Harry Hopkins, a friend and advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, tended to the new garden.

- President John F. Kennedy asked family friend and celebrated horticulturalist Rachel Lambert "Bunny" Mellon if she would redesign the White House gardens. She oversaw the redesign of the now famous Rose Garden outside the Oval Office, but work on the East Garden was delayed by the assassination of President Kennedy. First Lady "Lady Bird" Johnson called on Bunny Mellon to finish the work, dedicating the garden to her predecessor Mrs. Kennedy.

- On March 20, 2009, First Lady Michelle Obama created a 1,100-square-foot garden on the South Grounds. During her time in the White House, Mrs. Obama invited children to plant and harvest seasonal vegetables and herbs, teaching them about nutrition and healthy eating.

- First Lady Melania Trump has continued cultivating the garden for White House events.

Learn more about the White House Gardens and Grounds, Halloween traditions at the White House, and the White House Turkey Pardon.

About The White House Historical Association

First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy envisioned a restored White House that conveyed a sense of history through its decorative and fine arts. In 1961, the White House Historical Association was established to support her vision to preserve and share the Executive Mansion's legacy for generations to come. Supported entirely by private resources, the Association's mission is to assist in the preservation of the state and public rooms, fund acquisitions for the White House permanent collection, and educate the public on the history of the White House. Since its founding, the White House Historical Association has contributed more than $47 million in fulfillment of its mission. To learn more about the White House Historical Association, please visit www.whitehousehistory.org.

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